

Back to School Tips In the Time of COVID

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It's Back to School Time!!

Although this is like no other Back to School season, there are things parents can do to get our students ready for learning.

The tips are not likely to all be applicable to every situation. Read through and take what applies to you and your household.

The resources provided are just a glimpse of what exists. If you have specific questions about a situation, contact your local school district for clarification.

Face to Face, Hybrid, Virtual...Oh My!

With school districts offering a myriad of different ways to access instruction this fall, it can be confusing to determine what is the best option.

This is a very personal choice when several options are presented. Unless your district has decided to only do remote learning, you will have to make a choice between face to face and virtual instruction.

What you choose can depend on several factors: health risk factors in the family, student and parent comfort level, special needs of students, and other individual factors.

All Types of Virtual Learning

Some terms you might see in reference to virtual learning include synchronous and asynchronous lessons.

Synchronous lessons refer to “classes” that are scheduled for a certain time where student log in and are “live” with their teacher. This can allow for asking questions and interacting with teachers and peers, but can be difficult to schedule for students who are at a daycare or babysitting setting.

Asynchronous lessons can be prerecorded videos, posted assignments, or given readings that can be done at anytime before a deadline. This allows more flexibility in planning, but removes the social aspect of school.

Face to Face Changes

Each school district is enacting their own health and safety plan, but there are likely to be similar changes everywhere.

Obviously, cleaning protocols will be different than normal. Increased cleaning and awareness of hygiene will be universal.

Social distancing is also likely to be a focus of districts. Spaced desks, one way hallways, and limited groups in large spaces like the cafeteria and auditorium may be just a few of the changes.

Social and Emotional Concerns

Many students have been experiencing mental health concerns in the last six months. Uncertainty, family financial concerns, and less structure may have contributed to student unease.

Schools may be instituting universal screenings for social and emotional concerns. School counselors, social workers, and psychologists may be collaborating with teachers to embed social emotional learning into the classroom to support students.

If you have concerns about your child's mental health, please contact your school and/or a community resource.

Academic Concerns

Many parents and teachers are concerned about how the lapse in education and new requirements will affect student learning. While it's likely that students will have lost some progress, most students are in the same boat.

Most schools will be doing some kind of assessments during the return to school so that they can see where students are and how to structure curriculum.

Teachers are prepared for the idea that students will need a lot of review to recoup last year's learning.

What Can Parents Do?

First and foremost, it is critical that parents limit their criticism of the school district policies around their students. While parents may not agree with all of the decisions that their district is making, ensuring that students know that everyone is working to keep them safe and learning is very important.

Students tend to follow the lead of the adults around them. If adults are complaining about new rules and changes, students are more likely to feel anxious about the new school year. To keep students calm and ready for school, parents can practice relaxation strategies, like deep breathing or stretching, with their students.

What Can Parents Do? (cont.)

If your student will be completing some or all of their learning at home, setting up a space is vital. Work will be more productive in a space that is used specifically for school.

Make sure that your student has the materials they may need, including technology, paper, pencils, headphones, calculator, etc. Having everything nearby leads to less disruption during learning.

Avoid learning space near other distractions. Set up away from the television or areas where others might be engaged in louder activities.

What Can Parents Do? (cont.)

If your student is going to school and will be required to follow new rules, practice those rules at home before school starts.

Wearing a mask all day can be a daunting idea. Starting by wearing a mask at home for shorter periods of time can be a great way to build up tolerance. Allowing your student to choose a mask that they like and that fits well is also a good idea.

In addition, be sure to discuss with your student that some others may not be wearing a mask due to medical concerns. Remind them that they need to continue to follow the rules regardless of what others are doing.

What Can Parents Do? (cont.)

Monitoring your student's adjustment can be difficult as many tweens and teenagers are not forthcoming with their feelings, but it is important to look for signs of distress. Increased isolation, stress, and irritability can be signs that students may need additional support during this time.

If you feel that your student needs mental health services, please don't hesitate to contact your school's support staff (like a school counselor or a school psychologist), or a community based mental health agency.

The Bottom Line

The upcoming school year is going to be one for the record books for sure. It will be unlike any in recent history, and it is full of uncertainty.

If you have specific questions about your student, contact your school administrator. They will have the most specific information about your school district.

Everyone is going to be anxious about this school year. Parents, students, and school staff will need to work together to make this year run as smoothly as possible.